District Review Report

School District No. 79 Cowichan

April 5 - 7, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Ron Rubadeau, Superintendent, School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Cowichan Valley
District Number:	79
Superintendent:	Brian Hoole
Date of Visit:	April 5-7 2004
Team Chair:	Ron Rubadeau, Superintendent, SD 23 (Central Okanagan)
Team Members:	Cynthia Anderson, Teacher, SD 75 (Mission) Judy Arnold, Ministry of Education Steve Carlton, Assistant Superintendent, SD 34 (Abbotsford) Don Gordon, Principal, SD 54 (Bulkley Valley) Joyce Gram, Parent, SD 36 (Surrey) Stephen Hill, Ministry of Education Walter Posnikoff, Superintendent, SD 10 (Arrow Lakes)

Context

School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley) is located on Vancouver Island and serves the communities of Duncan, Chemainus and Lake Cowichan. The School District provides a comprehensive education program to 9,695 students in 4 secondary schools, 4 middle schools, and 21 elementary schools. The School District provides a comprehensive educational program and offers a wide range of educational choice including French Immersion, traditional, self-paced learning programs and alternate education programs. A School Board consisting of nine trustees governs the School District. They have identified five goals for improving student achievement. These goals are focused in areas relating to literacy, numeracy, social responsibility/human and social development, grade transition and graduation completion rates and parent and student satisfaction.

Summary of Process

Review team activities:

- Representatives from the District provided a comprehensive overview of the District context, improvement plan, and information on progress focusing on the District's ten points of study.
- The team visited 19 Elementary, Middle and Secondary Schools representing all geographic areas of the District.
- Four team members met with representatives of the District Parent Advisory Council
- One team member met with representatives of the Hwulmuhw Mustimuhw Education Advisory Committee.
- One team member met with representatives of the District Student Advisory Council
- Team members also met with members of the District Administrative Staff.

District Review Report

2003/2004

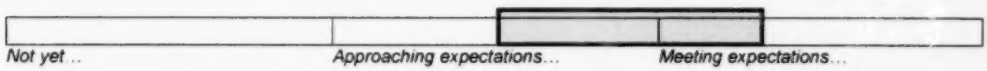
The Team reviewed the following documents:

- Review Team Binder outlining District goals. This binder was a comprehensive compilation of data relative to the District goals.
- Cowichan Valley Education Planning Binder outlining the District mission, vision and strategic plans relative to the improvement of student achievement.
- Two coiled booklets on the 10 Areas of Study for Student Achievement (Elementary/Middle Secondary)
- One coiled booklet outlining the District's K-12 plans for literacy, numeracy and safe schools/social responsibility
- Data Collection Worksheets for School Planning Councils (Elementary)
- Booklet entitled "Improvement Agreement Report" Baseline Data from 2001-02

The Team also reviewed materials presented at many of the schools visited and at meetings with parents.

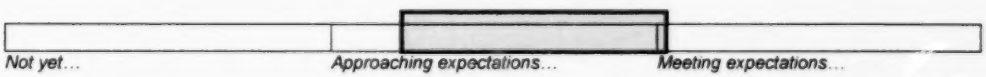
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



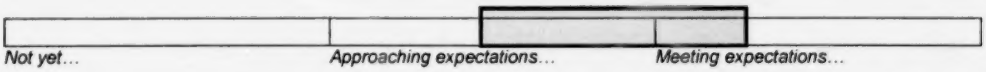
   - Goals are focused on student achievement. The District has established 5 goals.
   - A few schools have objectives that focus on specific groups of students.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



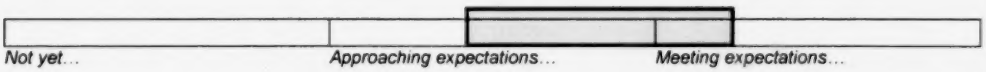
   - The District makes use of a variety of evidence to make decisions relative to student achievement.
   - Performance Standards are in use. Most schools are basing school plans on current data. There is a need for deeper analysis of school district data relative to the performance of Aboriginal students.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the District goals and is used to monitor progress.



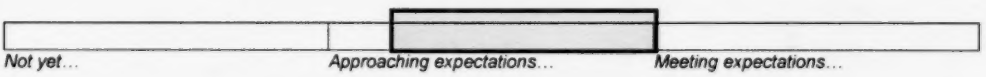
- Performance Standards and screening tools for early intervention are well established in the District.
- Data analysis relative to the performance of Aboriginal students needs to be reconsidered as standardized tools may not yield the best or most accurate information (i.e., FSA and provincial exam scores).

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



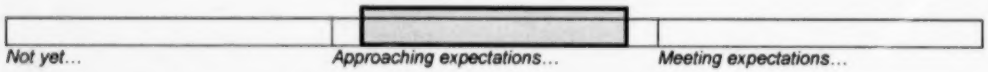
- The District and schools are using a variety of strategies to improve student achievement.
- Professional learning opportunities are provided.
- Strategies to address issues related to drug and alcohol abuse, bullying and racism need to be further developed.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, and organizations to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



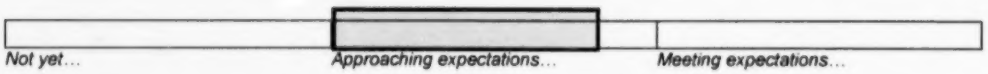
- Funding has been provided to schools to implement school plans.
- District-wide learning teams have been established related to district goals.
- The District is encouraged to explore further differentiating staffing and resources to address areas of greatest need.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



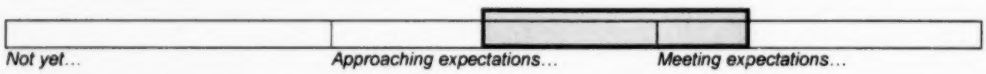
- Schools are beginning to get good results for some students
- The District and schools are in the early stages of monitoring results and developing the capacity to adjust strategies to inform instruction.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



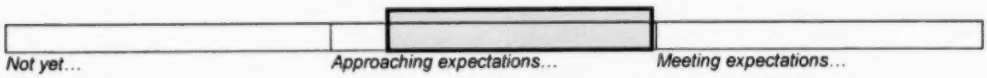
- The importance of student achievement is prominent in the agenda of senior management and school staff meetings.
- Most schools report using various means to communicate goals and progress.
- Parent representatives (PAC) are informed of school goals.
- School District communications with partner groups respecting school district plans, accomplishments and supports is not always clear.
- More effort is required to expand the dialogue in a positive way and encourage two-way communication.
- The District has appointed a communication officer to facilitate communication throughout the community and school district.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



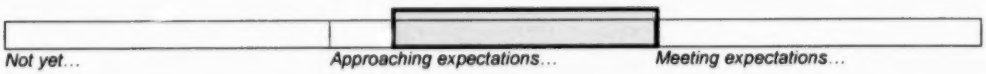
- Aligning school and district goals is a new process and there is a high level of consistency between school and district goals. However, the criteria used for the evaluation and approval of school goals are unclear and problematic for some schools.
- School Planning Councils have been established and most are enthusiastic about their involvement in helping schools plan to improve student learning.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Parent representatives (PAC/SPC) are involved in the development of school goals.
- Some parents are involved in district committees relative to monitoring the progress of district goals and participate on committees relative to board structures (e.g. finance).
- Some parents indicated that their voices are not heard at the District level with respect to significant decisions regarding structural change.
- Some Aboriginal parents are involved in making decisions on program and finance relative to targeted funding for Aboriginal students. Few Aboriginal parents are involved in school goal setting or specific school level programs directed to needs of Aboriginal students.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork*:
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- The District builds leadership capacity of school administrators to implement school goals and to develop strategies to improve achievement. The District needs to consider improving their efforts to build capacity among teachers, support staff and parents.
- A strong positive culture is present at most schools to support teamwork among parents, teachers, teacher leaders and administrators in setting school goals.

Strengths

The team observed particular strengths related to student achievement.

- Consistent commitment and hard work by staff directed to student achievement.
- A strong commitment to in-service and training for principals, vice-principals in the interest of developing instructional leaders at each school.
- Directors of Instruction are commended for their active support of schools and school staff in the interest of student achievement.
- Thoughtful and relevant documents to support achievement goals have been developed.
- The K-12 plan is outstanding.
- Use of Performance Standards in the areas of literacy, numeracy and human and social development is commendable.
- A variety of choices for students including self-paced learning, traditional schooling, French Immersion and challenge programs.

Promising Practices

- The development of the study document "10 Areas of Study for Student Achievement"
- Established District committees that actively involve students, parents and staff
- Daily involvement of parents in individual reading with students at home and in primary classrooms.
- The development of a District Student Advisory Council.
- Book bags for Elementary students to reinforce and support guided reading practice in the home.
- Computerized IEP formats for special education.
- The self-paced organizational structure of Frances Kelsey Secondary.
- Alberta Structured Writing program
- Books for Babes Program with community liaison support.
- The development of the Cowichan Valley School District K-12 Plan

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results.

- The team believes that everyone must model behaviour that builds a positive climate and culture committed to improving student achievement. Some relationships in the District seem to be confrontational and not focused on student achievement. The Review Team encourages the board, senior management, staff and parents to come together to create effective working relationships in the interest of all students.

- Several schools in the District face serious challenges in relation to improving student achievement. The team recommends that the District further differentiate the allocation of resources based on student needs.

- The District is very proud of its Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. The Team recommends that the District continue to place a high value on the improvement of Aboriginal achievement. In this regard the team strongly recommends that specific strategies to address the needs of Aboriginal students be clearly identified in school and district plans.